

2008 Federal Depository Library Conference

Encouraging An Informed Citizenry:

Locating and Using Congressional Research Service Reports

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What is a CRS Report?

- published by the Congressional Research Service
- created by research specialists at CRS
- created for members of Congress
- center around topics relevant to current legislation

About CRS

- public policy arm of the Library of Congress
- formed in 1914 to provide timely, objective research on legislative issues
- six interdisciplinary research divisions
 - American Law
 - Domestic Social Policy
 - Foreign Affairs Defense and Trade
 - Government and Finance
 - Information Research
 - Resources, Science and Industry
- yearly output:
 - almost 1,000 new documents
 - about 4,000 revised documents
 - several different products
 - short reports
 - long reports
 - issue briefs
 - info packs
 - and others

Current Public Access

- no public access through CRS
 - only members of Congress or CRS staff can search CRS website
- must request reports from their member of Congress (*see "Related Resources"*)
 - the public must know of a specific report's existence before making a request from a member of Congress
- can purchase from several third-party vendors
- use one of the freely-provided CRS archives online (*see "Related Resources"*)
 - these archives are searchable by topic/keyword, and some full-text

Efforts toward Public Access

- started effort to put reports online in 1991
- legislation requesting publicly accessible website for CRS reports was introduced into Congress multiple times:
 - 1998 (S.1578, H.R.3131)
 - twice in 1999 (S.393, H.R.654)
 - 2001 (S.R.21)
 - twice in 2003 (S.R.54, H.R.3630)
 - 2007 (H.R.2545); introduced May 24th
 - The Congressional Research Accessibility Act
 - official title: "To make available on the Internet, for purposes of access and retrieval by the public, certain information available through the Congressional Research Service web site."
 - reports would be made publicly accessible between 30 and 40 days of their publication on the internal CRS website
 - status: referred to the House Committee on House Administration
 - this legislation has never passed both houses of Congress

CRS Reports Archive at UNT

- over 10,000 reports available
- wide variety of subjects
- features:
 - browse by topic
 - full-text searching ability
- <http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/>

Other Resources Related to this Presentation

Free Sources for CRS Reports:

- OpenCRS
 - <http://opencrs.com/>
- CRS Reports at Thurgood Marshall Law Library
 - <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/index.asp>
- CRS Report Archive at the University of North Texas
 - <http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/>
- CRS Reports from the Federation of American Scientists
 - <http://www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRS/index.cfm?&CFID=10842369&CFTOKEN=53883781>
 - Intelligence, Military and National Security
- CRS Reports from the National Library for the Environment
 - <http://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/>
 - Environmental Law & Policy
- CRS Reports from the U.S. State Department
 - <http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/c18185.htm>
 - Foreign Policy and Relations
- IP Mall at Franklin Pierce Law School
 - http://www.ipmall.info/hosted_resources/crs_reports.asp
 - Intellectual Property, Cyberlaw, and Electronic Commerce

Resources for Writing Your Member of Congress

- find your Representative: <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>
- find your Senator: <http://www.senate.gov/>
- a three-paragraph letter is recommended:
 - a. State the purpose of the letter, and who you are (list your professional credentials). Include your name and address, even in an email.
 - b. Provide specific, factual information about why this report is important to you, and/or how you will use it. Cite the report using the proper title and the CRS report number.
 - c. Close by requesting the action you want taken. This may include having the report sent to you, or you may also request that they vote a specific way on legislation concerning CRS reports.

- addressing Members of Congress
 - To Your Senator
 - open the letter with, "Dear Senator:"
 - use this address block:

The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
 - To Your Representative:
 - open the letter with, "Dear Representative:"
 - use this address block:

The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
 - addressing the Chairperson of a Committee or the Speaker of the House:
 - Dear Mr. Chairman (or) Dear Madam Chairwoman
 - Dear Mr. Speaker (or) Dear Madam Speaker
 - use these addresses regardless of whether the communication format is email or a printed letters

CRS Director's memo on publications policy:

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/crs041807.pdf>

Sources for this Presentation

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